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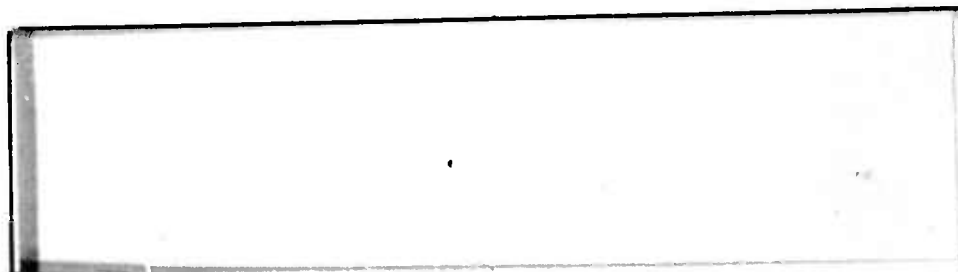
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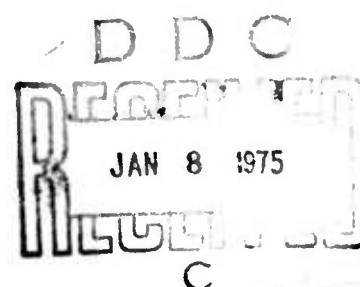
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CONVENTIONAL WARFARE IN EUROPE=THE SOVIET VIEW  
by

Dallas C. Brown, Jr.  
Lieutenant Colonel, U. S. Army

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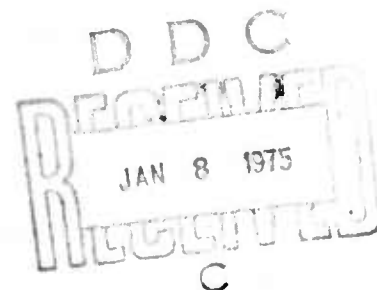
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THESIS

CONVENTIONAL WARFARE IN EUROPE--THE SOVIET VIEW

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Dallas C. Brown, Jr.

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Abstract of  
CONVENTIONAL WARFARE IN EUROPE--THE SOVIET VIEW

An analysis of the operational Soviet view on the possibility of conventional warfare between NATO and the Warsaw Pact in Europe. Soviet perceptions and policies concerning this subject since World War II are found to be mainly reactions to the prevailing nuclear balance. The Soviets would have preferred conventional warfare at any time during the period. Until the attainment of a credible strategic nuclear deterrent in the mid-1960s, they assumed that the United States would use nuclear weapons against them in a European conflict. Since that time the Soviets have reasoned that the United States and the rest of NATO may be deterred from the use of nuclear weapons. Accordingly, they have placed increased emphasis on preparations for conventional warfare in Europe. Soviet policy statements, military writings, training exercises, and force posture are found to accord with this general view. The Soviets, of course, can never be certain that NATO will not resort to nuclear weapons to avoid defeat. Given a choice, however, the Soviets will fight with conventional means alone as long as the survival of the Soviet state is not threatened.

## PREFACE

The title of this essay is admittedly ambitious. Naturally, there are various Soviet opinions on this vital problem. Almost invariably, however, there is an operational view on major issues. This project is intended to find and track that view--the one that influences Soviet policy decisions. The search was made easier because the Soviets have written extensively on the problem of a new war in Europe.

There is an unfortunate tendency among observers in the United States to categorize Soviet statements and writings on military affairs as rhetoric or disinformation. The antecedent of this approach is probably the bizarre theory that the Soviet leaders don't 'believe' in their own ideology. If this categorization is accurate, it means that the Soviet leadership habitually misleads its own officer corps on military policy. This seems unlikely, to put it mildly.

Primary Soviet sources were used to the extent possible. Material from Western sources was used to fill in the gaps. Most of the data concerning Soviet theater forces was taken from official US Government and NATO sources; the Soviets rarely publish information of this type.

Herein, the term "conventional war" is used for convenience, although the Soviets usually speak of "non-nuclear war." The Soviet term "local war" is not synonymous with US "limited war" because it implies geographical constraints but no restriction on weapons. A war confined to Europe (less the Soviet Union) would be "local"

regardless of the weapons used. Soviet "global" or "world" war is roughly synonymous with US "general war."

Non-Soviet Warsaw Pact military forces are not treated separately in this essay. In effect, they are subordinate elements of the Soviet theater forces.



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"It's not the big stick that counts,  
but the liftable stick."

Rudyard Kipling

## Introduction

In a season of relaxed tensions between East and West, one might wonder why yet another eclectic iteration of Soviet military strategy has utility. Detente notwithstanding, the Soviet leadership has not eliminated the possibility of major war between the two blocs. A cursory look at their recent policy statements makes this clear.

Unfortunately, Soviet views on the possibility of conventional warfare in a new European conflict are a subject of controversy among Western strategic theorists. The basic question is: Do the Soviets consider nuclear warfare to be "inevitable" in the event of a conflict between the two alliances in Europe? The Western debate has been inconclusive because some support for both sides of the argument can be found in Soviet policy statements and military writings.

To understand this apparent paradox, the question must be approached another way. The problem for the Soviets is whether NATO would "inevitably" resort to nuclear weapons in a European war. The Soviets can never be certain in their judgments on this question because they are attempting to gauge NATO intentions and probable courses of action. This explains the ambiguity that is present at times in Soviet pronouncements on the subject of war in Europe.

While the Soviets remain uncertain about NATO's nuclear intentions, they perforce have an operational view. My thesis is that the Soviet leadership now sees a decreased chance of nuclear warfare if a conflict

should occur in Europe. This view is based on their calculation that the United States and the rest of NATO may be deterred from the use of nuclear weapons. Over the last decade, Soviet confidence in their deterrent posture increased as they approached and gained strategic nuclear parity with the United States.

## II

### War and Peace

A basic Soviet precept on war is taken from Clausewitz. Marshal Sokolovskii's authoritative Voennaia Strategiia (Military Strategy) cites Lenin's remarks on the German theorist and avows: "Marxism-Leninism takes as its point of departure the premise that war is not an aim in itself, but rather a tool of politics."<sup>1</sup> Soviet behavior has borne out this proposition. The Soviets are unlikely to start any war without concluding (after careful deliberation) that the anticipated gains outweigh the probable losses--one might think that this would be a universal rule among nations, but unfortunately it is not. With strategic nuclear parity and a hostile China in the background, a Soviet attack against the West would be, in Leninist terms, a dangerous "adventure."

The Soviets maintain, however, that there will be a chance of war being caused by the West as long as capitalist states exist. In 1971, Secretary-General Brezhnev reminded the 24th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party (CPSU): "We cannot consider that the threat of a new

world war has been fully eliminated."<sup>2</sup> Late in 1973, Brezhnev elaborated on this theme before an international peace conference in Moscow: "We also have no right to forget that, in conditions of the easing of international tension, processes that constitute material preparations for a world war are continuing and even intensifying."<sup>3</sup>

Apparently, Chairman Khrushchev's definitive 1963 typology of modern wars that could involve NATO and the Warsaw Pact is still operational in Soviet thinking. In addition to "global war," it included "local wars" and "wars of national liberation."<sup>4</sup> The Soviets assert that a "local war" in Europe could begin in various ways including NATO surprise attack, actions of allies, miscalculation, and accident.

A perennially volatile aspect of the Soviet world view is the conviction that their politico-economic system is historically and morally correct and that others are wrong. This messianic bent gives rise to the belief that other systems should be replaced with theirs and the faith that the long run of history is on their side. The Soviets, however, no longer maintain that a final cataclysmic war is inevitable, much less desirable. It would be too risky. The Soviet leadership rationalizes that their system will win in the end if they can avoid the destruction of the Soviet state in a nuclear holocaust.

The complementary policies of detente and deterrence are manifestations of this general outlook. We must not, however, lose sight of what these policies mean to the Soviets. They consider detente--which is not new in Soviet history--to be another form of the continuous struggle. In 1973, one Soviet writer explained why the struggle

continues during this period of relaxed tensions: "It cannot be otherwise since the world outlook and class goals of socialism and capitalism are irreconcilable."<sup>5</sup> The policy of deterrence is not limited to protecting the Soviet Union and her allies. It is also intended to provide cover for whatever political or military initiatives might seem both desirable and feasible.

### III

#### The Strategic Context

In Europe, detente and deterrence are being used in tandem to pursue specific goals. One of the aims is to decouple the US strategic attack forces from the defense of Western Europe. The tone of their recent writings indicates that the Soviets may believe this has already taken place. A 1972 Soviet analysis of NATO's nuclear posture makes this point repeatedly. A typical passage approvingly quotes a West German author: "Can West Germany seriously expect that America will put its head on the nuclear guillotine if a conflict occurs on the FRG-GDR border?"<sup>6</sup> A 1974 article on US nuclear strategy by V. Larionov, a leading Soviet military writer, shows similar reasoning: "Given the present alignment of forces (including nuclear forces), there is an enormous distance between bellicose plans and their realization."<sup>7</sup>

The disintegration of the NATO Alliance is a concurrent objective. Brezhnev was candid when he stated, in 1967: "In our opinion, it is quite correct that communists and all other progressive forces should try to . . . develop more widely the struggle against the preservation

of this aggressive bloc."<sup>8</sup> Soviet diplomatic initiatives toward several West European nations, in particular France and West Germany, appear to be aimed at this objective.

The Soviets carefully thought out and developed the military aspects of their policy toward Europe. Their military posture in Europe is closely aligned with political objectives. Though it may surprise some, the main purpose of the Soviet theater forces is not to overrun or destroy Western Europe. Instead, they are designed to prevent any military action by Western nations against the Soviet Union and her East European allies; this has probably been the case since the end of World War II. In effect, the Soviets are currently telling NATO:

- (1) If you risk nuclear warfare against us, you will be annihilated.
- (2) If you try to fight us at the conventional level, you will be overrun. Naturally the Soviets like this situation. This explains why Brezhnev announced in 1973: "From our standpoint, it is important that the future reduction not violate the existing balance of forces in Central Europe and on the European continent in general."<sup>9</sup>

From the Soviet point of view, these policies have been successful till now. Being prudent, however, the Soviets must consider what might happen if deterrence fails. A nuclear war (even if limited to Europe) would jeopardize the survival of the Soviet state and various political objectives could be lost in a nuclear wasteland. Accordingly, it is manifest that the Soviets would prefer to keep the level of destruction in a European war as low as possible.



Nevertheless, some strategic theorists in the West have concluded that the Soviets reject the idea of any limitations in a war between the blocs in Europe. For example, John Erickson, the noted British author, maintains that the Soviets view the prospect of conventional or tactical nuclear warfare in Europe with "ill-concealed scepticism."<sup>10</sup> In my opinion, what Erickson terms "scepticism" is simply uncertainty concerning NATO's use of nuclear weapons, not rejection of conventional warfare per se. This essay argues that it is erroneous not to differentiate between Soviet views on conventional and tactical nuclear warfare, because the Soviets, themselves, make a distinction (this delineation in Soviet thinking is clearly illustrated in subsequent sections).

Western arguments that the Soviets reject the possibility of conventional warfare in Europe are often based on two factors: The first is the tremendous Soviet nuclear capability in Europe coupled with certain limitations in their theater forces, e.g., logistics and conventional firepower.\* The second is the fact that most current Soviet military writings are devoted to the various problems of nuclear warfare and often postulate massive nuclear exchanges in Europe. The accuracy of the foregoing is not disputed, but there are aspects of the matter that often have been ignored. Soviet nuclear weapons serve primarily as a deterrent; they are essential regardless of preferred war fighting

\*Soviet ground divisions are smaller than their NATO counterparts. They have less logistic support and conventional firepower. Apparently, they were originally designed for a short nuclear campaign.



strategies. Further, limitations in the Soviet theater forces should be considered in relation to NATO forces in Europe. By Western estimates their conventional capabilities in Europe are equal to or greater than NATO's.<sup>11</sup> Finally, aside from whatever value it has as an assist to the deterrent posture, the emphasis on nuclear warfare in Soviet military writings reflects concentration on the most critical eventuality. This focus on the "worst case" is also present in Western military writings for precisely the same reason.

#### IV

##### Historical Overview

Overall US nuclear superiority restricted Soviet choices concerning war in Europe until the mid-1960s. The Soviets assumed that the United States would use nuclear weapons against them in a European conflict. The weight of the evidence, however, does not reveal a Soviet preference for nuclear warfare in Europe. Rather, it shows that the Soviets for many years were mainly reacting to perceived nuclear threats from the United States, i.e., "massive retaliation" and the nuclear aspect of "flexible response."

After World War II, the Soviets maintained large conventional forces opposite Western Europe as a deterrent against a US nuclear attack on the Soviet Union. In the late 1950s, theater nuclear systems\* replaced

\*medium bombers, rockets, and missiles directed against Western Europe and US bases around the periphery of the Soviet Union.

conventional forces as the principal Soviet deterrent. Finally, in the mid-1960s, strategic nuclear systems targeted against the United States became the main Soviet deterrent. At this juncture the Soviets probably felt less constrained by US nuclear superiority--by 1964 the Soviets had deployed over 300 ICBMs and SLBMs.<sup>12</sup>

At the end of the Khrushchev era (1964), the Soviets had sufficient confidence in their deterrent posture to begin rethinking the problem of conventional warfare in Europe. Over the past decade, they have been preparing for this contingency. The evolution of Soviet views on this question since World War II is instructive; it shows that the issue has been present in Soviet deliberations over the entire period.

Stalin's Last Years (1945-53). The immediate postwar years reflected almost total reliance on conventional forces with a continental orientation. In 1946, Generalissimo Stalin said: "Atomic bombs are intended to frighten the weak-nerved but they cannot decide the outcome of war since atomic bombs are by no means sufficient for this purpose."<sup>13</sup> Stalin kept doctrinal discussions within the military on a tight rein. He forced his strategic theorists to concentrate on his theory of "the permanently operating factors of war." These factors were stability of the rear, morale, condition of the economy, size and quality of the military forces, equipment, and ability of the commanders. This theory excluded surprise and nuclear weapons as significant factors in the outcome of a future war.<sup>14</sup>

The inference from Stalin's theory was that a new war in Europe would be essentially a rerun of World War II. Soviet conventional forces

in Eastern Europe were reorganized and given priority in terms of equipment and training. Implicit in this policy was the threat to use Soviet conventional forces against Western Europe in response to a US nuclear attack on the Soviet Union, i.e., the "hostage Europe" strategy.

In retrospect, it is clear that Stalin's policy was a masterful tour de force. While publicly deemphasizing the significance of nuclear weapons, the Soviet Union proceeded to develop them as rapidly as possible, breaking the US monopoly in something less than five years (1949). In sum, Stalin was getting the most mileage out of his conventional strength while simultaneously conducting a crash program to gain a permanent counter to the US nuclear threat.

The Interregnum (1953-57). During this period of transition Stalin's concepts were mostly discarded and there was general consensus that a new war would be nuclear--the Soviets began to deploy theater nuclear weapons opposite Western Europe. Yet, the main role was reserved for ground forces. A European war would still be a rerun of World War II--this time with nuclear weapons in support. The war would begin with a nuclear exchange. It would, however, be protracted and the final outcome would be decided by massive land armies.

There was little open discussion about conducting warfare solely with the use of conventional weapons. Chairman Malenkov may have been thinking about it when, in 1954, he made statements to the effect that both sides were deterred from starting a nuclear war, but he never spelled out his thesis.<sup>15</sup>

The 1957-58 Rapacki Plan was a clearer indication that the issue was not dead. With Soviet concurrence, Poland proposed to eliminate nuclear weapons from both Germanies, Poland, and Czechoslovakia. The final US reply stated that if NATO forces in West Germany were not equipped with nuclear weapons they would be at a "great disadvantage to the numerically greater mass of Soviet troops"<sup>16</sup> (one might hazard a guess that this imbalance was why the Soviets allowed the proposal in the first place). The Soviets, of course, heartily endorsed the proposal. Foreign Minister Gromyko stated that it would be an "important step" toward reducing the danger of nuclear war. He criticized the US position: "The objections that have so far been raised in connection with this proposal are artificial and cannot be considered at all convincing."<sup>17</sup>

Over the years since the Rapacki Plan the Soviets have shown continuing interest in nuclear-free zones in Europe and elsewhere.<sup>18</sup> Soviet sincerity in these matters has been questioned in the West, because there is propagandistic value in such proposals. Nevertheless, the Rapacki Plan and similar initiatives constitute prima facie evidence of Soviet willingness to take their chances in a conventional conflict with NATO.

The Khrushchev Years (1957-64). Khrushchev's basic strategic view was that a war between NATO and the Warsaw Pact would rapidly become global and nuclear and that nuclear weapons would be decisive in such a conflict.<sup>19</sup> He believed, however, that a major war could be avoided. Khrushchev demonstrated his confidence by reversing a cardinal

Marxist-Leninist principle. He declared: "It is not fatalistically inevitable. Today there are mighty social and political forces possessing formidable means to prevent the imperialists from unleashing war . . . ."20

Khrushchev leaned heavily on deterrence, espousing, in 1960, a concept akin to "massive retaliation."<sup>21</sup> It was largely a bluff because the Soviet Union did not have the means to fully execute the policy. By 1960, the Soviets had deployed sizeable theater nuclear forces opposite Western Europe; however, the number of strategic nuclear systems was still low.<sup>22</sup>

As a corollary to his basic view on the primacy of nuclear weapons, Khrushchev felt that certain kinds of conventional forces were becoming obsolete.\* He sought to reduce them in order to free resources for nuclear weapons and other purposes.<sup>23</sup> The reduction was resisted by certain senior military officers. The argument was over balance, not conventional warfare per se. In 1961, Defense Minister Malinovskii (tactfully) stated the military case to the Party Central Committee: "Although nuclear weapons will hold the decisive place in future war, we are nevertheless coming to the conclusion that final victory over an aggressor can be achieved only through combined operations by all branches of the armed forces. We are therefore devoting due attention to the perfection of weapons of all types."<sup>24</sup> The same points were stressed in

\*Khrushchev, in 1964, even disestablished the Soviet Ground Forces as an independent high command. The command was reactivated in 1967.

Sokolovskii's Voennaia Strategia. This emphasis on balance between nuclear and conventional forces became a basic tenet of Soviet military policy after Khrushchev's demise and remains operational.\*

There is no reason to believe that the Soviet leaders thought that conventional warfare in Europe was feasible at the beginning of the 1960s. They had to assume that the United States would use nuclear weapons against them in the event of a European conflict--US policy pronouncements coupled with the unfavorable nuclear balance made this conclusion inescapable. Khrushchev was probably thinking of conventional warfare outside Europe when he said: "There have been local wars in the past and they may break out again." Overall deterrence appeared to be uppermost in his thoughts when he added: "A small scale imperialist war, no matter which of the imperialists starts it, may develop into a world thermo-nuclear, missile war. We must, therefore, fight against world wars and local wars."<sup>25</sup>

It is also evident that Marshal Malinovskii had little confidence in any limitations in case of war in Europe between the blocs during this period. Still, it should be remembered that his oft-quoted 1961 remark about the "inevitability" of nuclear warfare was in reference to a world war. Further, he used charges of Western preparation for local wars as argumentation for better balance in the Soviet Armed Forces.

\*In the Soviet military lexicon "balance" means primacy to strategic forces along with sufficient general-purpose forces to provide backup and meet other contingencies.

Malinovskii (like Khrushchev) was probably thinking of potential trouble spots outside Europe, e.g., the Middle East.<sup>26</sup>

Malinovskii's main concern in Europe seems to have been the use of tactical nuclear weapons that was (and is) explicit in the Western doctrine of "flexible response." In his 1962 book, Bditelno Stoiat na Strazhe Mira (Vigilantly Stand Guard Over the Peace), Malinovskii framed a reply to the West: "No matter where tactical atomic weapons might be used against us, they would call forth a devastating retaliatory strike."<sup>27</sup> This threat became the basic tenet of what Western strategists have coined "declaratory strategy."<sup>\*</sup>

The Post-Khrushchev Period (1964-74). At the end of the Khrushchev regime and afterward, Malinovskii's doctrine gained credibility due to the shifting nuclear balance. The increased US emphasis on the conventional aspect of "flexible response" in the mid-1960s was an unmistakable signal to the Soviets that their deterrent posture was increasingly effective. Their confidence was further increased by the attainment of rough strategic nuclear parity with the United States toward the end of the 1960s and the interim Strategic Arms Limitations Agreement of 1972.

By 1965, the transition which I have suggested was underway. Recognizing that the United States and the rest of NATO might be deterred from the use of nuclear weapons after all, the Soviets again began to

<sup>\*</sup>This doctrine, in itself, serves as a deterrent against NATO use of tactical nuclear weapons. Many observers in the United States, including this one, feel that the Soviets would select another option in a crisis.



think seriously about conventional warfare in Europe. This proposition can be further supported by evidence derived from Soviet policy statements, military writings, training exercises, and force posture. The evidence, which spans the entire post-Khrushchev period, will be provided in subsequent sections.

V

Policy Statements

Speeches and writings by senior Soviet officials show a discernible shift since the end of the Khrushchev period. The possibility of conventional warfare is acknowledged and references to the "inevitability" of nuclear warfare are often omitted or carefully hedged. To use a favorite Soviet expression, it was not by chance! The following statements were selected because they seem to represent the prevalent Soviet view. They are placed in chronological order to show the trend.

(1965) Col Gen S.M. Shetemenko. Shortly after Khrushchev's departure, Gen Shetemenko, a senior ground force officer, provided his view of the situation. He wrote: "Both the United States' monopoly and superiority in the field of nuclear armament have been lost." He explained that this was why the United States adopted more flexible military doctrines. Again referring to the United States, he noted: "There are more and more frequent references to a war without nuclear weapons or in which only tactical nuclear weapons will be used in the framework of local or limited wars. Soviet military doctrine does not exclude such wars, but we are against the use of any nuclear weapons



in general and in the talk of imperialists about tactical nuclear weapons, we see only a trick intended somehow to help motivate and legalize the use of the atom against mankind."<sup>28</sup>

(1965) Secretary-General L.I. Brezhnev. The leader of the Soviet Communist Party declared: "While paying special attention to nuclear-missile weapons, we are not forgetting the large role that still belongs to conventional types of arms. Our army continues to be provided with the latest tanks, aircraft, artillery and other equipment."<sup>29</sup>

(1965) Col Gen N.A. Lomov. This strategist pointed out that the West was then conducting "local wars" and might do so in the future. Then he observed: "As the American strategy of flexible response openly testifies, such a war might take place in Europe also. Local wars, judging by those that have taken place, are conducted as a rule with the use of conventional means of armed conflict. However, this does not exclude the possibility of the use of tactical and operational nuclear weapons in them." Gen Lomov added: "If nuclear powers are involved, the possibility of escalation is always great, and under certain circumstances, it may become inevitable." He concluded: "Soviet forces should be prepared not only for global nuclear war but also for operations with limited use of nuclear weapons and without them, that is with the use of conventional means."<sup>30</sup>

(1967) Admiral-of-the-Fleet S.G. Gorshkov. While discussing the roles and missions of the Soviet Navy, the Commander-in-Chief spoke of the need for a "well balanced Navy." He defined it as a Navy "which, by virtue of its composition and armament, is capable of accomplishing

assigned missions both in missile-nuclear war and also in war without the use of such weapons, and is also capable of protecting state interests on the high seas in peacetime."<sup>31</sup>

(1967) Marshal I.I. Yakubovskii. At the time of his appointment as Commander-in-Chief of the Warsaw Pact Forces, he warned: "We must not absolutize the role and capabilities of nuclear weapons, especially in achieving the goals of combat operations of the Ground Forces. These forces must be prepared to conduct combat operations without the use of nuclear weapons under various conditions, using conventional, regular, classic troop armaments--artillery, tanks, guns, and so forth."<sup>32</sup>

(1969) Marshal A.A. Grechko. The Defense Minister declared: "War may begin with the use of nuclear weapons or by the use of conventional forces and means. Various versions of the combined utilization of all types of the enemy's weapons are possible." He then emphasized the need for balance and stated that all branches of the Soviet Armed Forces are being provided "with the newest combat means."<sup>33</sup>

(1970) Marshal A.A. Grechko. The Marshal stated that nuclear weapons would be "the main and decisive means" in a new world war. He added: "In it classical types of armaments will also find use. In certain circumstances, the possibility of conducting combat actions with conventional weapons is admitted."<sup>34</sup>

(1974) Marshal A.A. Grechko. After pointing out that "the decisive branch of the Armed Forces is the Strategic Rocket Troops," the Defense Minister returned to the theme of balance. He said "the combat capabilities of the Ground Forces, the Air Defense Forces, the Air Force, and the Navy have increased considerably."<sup>35</sup>

These pronouncements must be considered authoritative because of the high positions held by the commentators. Grechko's statements are particularly significant because he is currently both Defense Minister and a member of the Politburo.

The statements are consistent over a long period and, in sum, reveal (1) recognition that conventional warfare between the blocs in Europe is possible, (2) preparation for conventional as well as nuclear warfare, and (3) uncertainty about escalation.

## VI

### Military Writings

There is a multitude of contemporary Soviet writings on military affairs. Much of it addresses various aspects of nuclear warfare. Over the past decade, however, Soviet theorists have devoted increased attention to the problem of conventional warfare. The following examples illustrate the trend in Soviet thinking on the subject.\*

\*There are occasional statements in contemporary Soviet writings on nuclear warfare that mention the "inevitability" of nuclear war if the major powers are drawn into a conflict. This anomaly probably results from differing opinions among Soviet theorists over NATO's use of nuclear weapons. A similar dichotomy exists in the West, i.e., is conventional war with the Soviet Union feasible?

The 1968 edition of Voennaia Strategia, along with the two earlier volumes, deals primarily with general war.\* It postulates a massive nuclear exchange in Europe, followed by a nuclear-supported blitzkrieg. Nevertheless, the possibility of conventional warfare is acknowledged. Conventional warfare is discussed in connection with the authors' concern about escalation. The authors, who are leading military theorists, argue that the Soviet Union and her allies "must be ready for local wars." They continue: "The methods for conducting such wars must be studied in order to prevent their expansion into a global war."<sup>36</sup>

The 1968 volume contains an expanded discussion of Western concepts for waging limited war in Europe. The authors cite Western theorists and lay out the various pros and cons in some detail. Then they end the discussion with a terse critique: "Various limitations are mostly fraught with a tremendous danger of escalating into general nuclear war, especially if tactical nuclear weapons are used."<sup>37</sup> The point that comes through is not that the authors reject conventional warfare per se, but that they fear general war arising from any armed conflict between the blocs. To put it another way, the authors' order of preference seems to be: (1) "peaceful coexistence," (2) conventional war, (3) limited nuclear war, and, if all else fails, (4) general war.

\*Voennaia Strategia (Military Strategy), a definitive work on Soviet strategy for general war, was first published in 1962. Subsequent editions were published in 1963 and 1968. As all three editions are primarily devoted to nuclear strategy, conventional warfare is not treated in a comprehensive manner. Yet, two trends in the authors' thinking on this subject are apparent. The 1963 and 1968 editions show increasing interest in the Western doctrine of "flexible response" and the requirement to be prepared for "local wars."

In 1969, the Soviets published an updated study of war in the current epoch entitled Metodologicheskie Problemy Voennoy Teorii i Praktiki (Methodological Problems of Military Theory and Practice). The authors (senior military officers) were faculty members at the prestigious Lenin Military-Political Academy. These officers acknowledge the possibility of conventional warfare but show uncertainty as to its duration: "The imperialists can begin it and wage it for some time without the use of nuclear weapons."<sup>38</sup> They point out the danger of escalation, stating that limited war "can become the detonator of nuclear war."<sup>39</sup> The authors also discuss the differences in roles and missions if nuclear weapons are not used, e.g., the roles of artillery and armor are upgraded.

The authors argue for balance between nuclear and conventional forces, giving several reasons:

In the first place, wars without the use of nuclear weapons are possible. Secondly, if nuclear weapons are used, it will not be possible to resolve all problems of armed conflict with their help; one cannot, for example, occupy the territory of the enemy. Thirdly, for some objectives the use of nuclear weapons would be simply inadvisable.<sup>40</sup>

In short, the authors are saying that conventional war is possible and that substantial conventional forces will be required, even in a nuclear war.

Though not in the context of discussions on conventional warfare, this book suggests that preemption is the preferred Soviet strategy. Referring to strategic forces and elements near the borders, the authors declare: "Their duty is to raise combat readiness tirelessly so as to be capable at any moment of frustrating the surprise attack of the

probable enemy and seizing the strategic initiative from the very beginning of military operations."<sup>41</sup> Marshal Grechko used an almost identical formulation in 1971, when he discussed "effectively repelling or thwarting an aggressor's surprise attacks."<sup>42</sup> This thought bears consideration. If this concept can be applied to a conflict being waged at the conventional level in Europe, it indicates that the Soviets hope to learn of NATO's decision to launch a nuclear attack in time to strike first.

Yevropa i Yadernoye Oruzhiye (Europe and Nuclear Weapons), published in 1972, is a comprehensive analysis of NATO nuclear policies from the 1950s to the current period. It was written by A.Ye. Yefremov, a leading Soviet strategic theorist. Yefremov's central argument is that NATO's nuclear policies are "bankrupt." He asserts that the United States and the rest of NATO are deterred, noting in the conclusion: "The role of nuclear weapons in imperialist plans has undergone a substantial evolution. The reason for this has been, above all, the radical changes in the balance of strategic forces."<sup>43</sup>

Yefremov is skeptical about the resolve of the United States and the rest of NATO to use nuclear weapons. He describes NATO disarray over nuclear policy, e.g., control and release of weapons. He implies that the NATO decision-making process for release of nuclear weapons is so involved that it might not work in a crisis.<sup>44</sup>

Yefremov directly attacks US concepts for tactical nuclear warfare. He asserts that attempting to use nuclear weapons to achieve victory in the current period would be "unrealistic." He continues:



In particular, the threat of using some of the American tactical nuclear weapons to carry out local actions in Europe, figuring that the use of warning nuclear shots will not lead to escalation and a global thermonuclear war, is used to blackmail enemies. It is perfectly obvious that calculations of this type are dictated by propaganda, rather than military considerations.<sup>45</sup>

The author is saying, in other words, that NATO's nuclear doctrine is a bluff.

Yefremov also makes a highly instructive point concerning Western misinterpretation of Soviet views. He complains: "Numerous attempts were made in the West to distort the sense of the USSR's position on the question of limited wars."<sup>46</sup> As an example, he uses a statement in Raymond Garthoff's 1958 treatise on Soviet strategy: "The Soviets generally deny the possibility of future local wars (i.e., wars limited geographically to some particular theater of operations) because they want to deter the United States from initiating such wars . . . ."<sup>47</sup>

In rebuttal, Yefremov explains the Soviet position:

The fact that the Soviet Union was fighting by every means to prevent the imperialists from unleashing both large and small wars is, of course, known to everyone. But the possibility of limited wars was by no means disputed. The point was something else, that such wars inevitably increase the risk of escalation and the development into global war, and therefore a determined struggle should be waged against their arising. That was the point of view of the Soviet government and it remains such.<sup>48</sup>

Yefremov, like other Soviet theorists and spokesmen, is not concerned over conventional war qua war; he is worried about possible nuclear escalation. It is significant that Khrushchev expressed the same view of small wars a decade earlier when he was explaining his policy of deterrence. Here we see continuity in Soviet thinking on this key issue.

Soviet writings on tactics often discuss methods for implementing the views on conventional warfare expressed in the more theoretical works. A 1971 article by Lt Gen I. Zavyalov in Soviet Military Review points out the enhanced roles of artillery, armor, and tactical aircraft when nuclear weapons are not used. The author mentions the requirement to have units "in constant high readiness to repulse enemy nuclear attacks" and the "permanent threat of the use of nuclear weapons." In a revealing statement, Gen Zavyalov complains: "The difficulty here is to foresee the stage of the operation at which nuclear weapons may be employed." The inference is that the nuclear initiative has been ceded to NATO.<sup>49</sup> A 1973 article in the same journal entitled "APCs in the Offensive" discusses the use of infantry and armored personnel carriers in both nuclear and conventional operations. The thrust of the article is that tactical units must be prepared for both forms of warfare.<sup>50</sup>

As acknowledged, many Soviet writings deal almost exclusively with problems of nuclear warfare. Even these often contain carefully worded statements that conventional warfare is a possibility. An example is a 1970 book that has gained considerable attention in the United States. Nastupleniye (The Offensive) is a well developed exposition of offensive operations under nuclear conditions. Yet, the conclusion states: "In a number of cases units will have to perform various combat actions without use of nuclear weapons, using only conventional, organic, classic means of armament--artillery, tanks, small arms, and so forth."<sup>51</sup>



As in the foregoing examples, Soviet writings on the subject of conventional warfare are generally consistent in their themes. They also correlate with and develop the points made in the different policy statements on this subject. The statements and writings alone make a good case for increased Soviet interest in conventional warfare in Europe. There are still other signs; these transcend the level of statements and writings.

## VII

### Training Exercises

Major Soviet and Warsaw Pact maneuvers since the mid-1960s have reflected the increased emphasis on conventional warfare found in Soviet statements and military writings. Although detailed information from Soviet sources is not available, Western sources provide sufficient data to establish the trend:<sup>52</sup>

1965. Warsaw Pact exercise "October Storm" apparently was the initial field test for a Soviet version of "flexible response."\* The scenario was: (1) NATO conventional attack, (2) Warsaw Pact conventional defense and counterattack (lasting about three days), (3) NATO use of nuclear weapons, and (4) Warsaw Pact nuclear response and pursuit.

1966. Warsaw Pact exercise "Vltava" was nuclear from the outset with NATO precipitating the nuclear exchange. The scenario included a Warsaw Pact mobile defense and counterattack.

\*From the mid-1950s to 1965 major Soviet/Warsaw Pact exercises did not emphasize purely conventional operations.

1967. Two Warsaw Pact exercises used the 1965 scenario of conventional operations prior to NATO introduction of nuclear warfare. Exercise "Dnepr" was a large unilateral Soviet exercise. It was conventional throughout. The exercise was designed to test the offensive capabilities of the newly reorganized Soviet Ground Forces. This exercise included penetrations up to 500 miles, airborne landings, and river crossings.

1970. Exercise "Dvina" was a large-scale Soviet maneuver intended to test the proficiency of the Soviet theater forces. Mobilization procedures and airborne landings were highlights. Both nuclear and conventional operations took place. A Warsaw Pact exercise called "Brotherhood-in-Arms" may have been conventional in its entirety.

1972. Warsaw Pact exercise "Shield-72" involved defense and counterattack against a NATO invasion. Both nuclear and conventional operations occurred.

As the foregoing chronology shows, the Soviet Union and the other Warsaw Pact nations have been conducting training exercises under both nuclear and conventional conditions since 1965. We are not justified in concluding that these exercise scenarios precisely reflect the way the Soviets think events would proceed in wartime--exercises are simply rehearsals for various eventualities. Nevertheless, the instructive fact is that the Soviets have been training the theater forces in Eastern Europe for the contingency of conventional warfare since at least the mid-1960s.

## VIII

### Force Posture

Since World War II, the Soviet Union has kept large theater forces in Eastern Europe. Over the years, they have served primarily as a deterrent against NATO, but their war fighting potential for either nuclear or conventional warfare is impressive.

The Soviet theater nuclear systems include missiles, aircraft, and tactical rockets. Altogether, the ground forces have about 160 divisions, at varying peacetime strengths. Roughly half of these could be committed against NATO, after a brief period of mobilization. Some 31 of the NATO-oriented divisions are stationed in Eastern Europe. These divisions are kept at a high state of readiness and are supported by a mobilization and reinforcement system that would allow a rapid buildup of forces from the Soviet Union. The ground forces would be supported by Soviet tactical aviation. There are about 4,500 combat aircraft assigned to operational units providing air defense, ground support, and reconnaissance. About one-third of the tactical aircraft are deployed in Eastern Europe. The Soviet Navy is prepared to support a theater campaign in various ways, including interdiction of sea lines of communication. The Soviet theater forces would be augmented by the armed forces of the other Warsaw Pact nations.<sup>53</sup>

For perspective, it is useful to note that the FY 1975 US Defense Department Annual Report states: "There is an approximate balance between the immediately available forces of NATO and the Warsaw Pact

in the Center Region." The report also mentions several Warsaw Pact advantages. These include more ground force personnel, more tanks, and the capability to mobilize faster than NATO.<sup>54</sup>

The Soviet Union is also conducting a program to modernize the theater forces. The JCS Chairman, Adm T.H. Moorer, testified before the U.S. Congress early in 1974: "The Soviet Union, despite the clear commitment it is making to the major modernization of its strategic offensive forces, has not neglected general purpose force modernization. New tanks, aircraft, and ships are being developed and deployed, apparently as long-range, sustained, and deliberate across-the-board modernization."<sup>55</sup> The Soviet modernization program includes several categories of equipment that have a primarily conventional orientation, e.g., ground support aircraft, armored fighting vehicles, and assault helicopters.<sup>56</sup>

The deployed Soviet theater forces and the modernization programs do not, in themselves, constitute conclusive evidence of increased Soviet emphasis on conventional warfare. The theater forces are already dual-capable and much of the modernization simply enhances this posture. There are, however, additional signs whose meaning is clearer.

As mentioned, Soviet theater forces in Eastern Europe have suffered from certain limitations that might have hampered them in a conventional conflict, e.g., logistics and conventional firepower.\* Over the past

\*A greater logistic capability is needed to support a conventional campaign as it would probably last longer than a nuclear operation. Additional ground and air firepower is required in a conventional campaign to replace the nuclear support that would be lacking.

half dozen or so years, the Soviets have moved to correct these deficiencies. About 1500 tanks have been added to the Soviet forces in East Germany. The number of artillery pieces in Soviet divisions has almost doubled. In tactical aviation units, increased emphasis has been placed on air support for ground units. Protection for aircraft and their support facilities on the ground is being upgraded. Conventional ammunition stocks have been augmented. The logistic system in Eastern Europe has been improved through increased motor transport capacity. Pipelines have been extended and upgraded. All told, these measures provide hard evidence of Soviet preparations for conventional warfare in Europe.<sup>57</sup>

## IX

### Conclusions

The Soviet rulers prefer the ongoing detente to any form of direct armed conflict with the West. They see no reason to risk the survival of the Soviet state in military "adventures." The Soviet hierarchy rationalizes that the long run of history is on their side.

If war occurs in Europe, the Soviets would prefer to keep it at the conventional level; they are afraid that any use of nuclear weapons will escalate to general war. This has been the case since the end of World War II. Until the attainment<sup>4</sup> of a credible strategic nuclear deterrent in the mid-1960s, the Soviets assumed that a new European war would "inevitably" ascend to the use of nuclear weapons. The Soviets reasoned that NATO, at some point, would resort to nuclear

weapons to avoid defeat. With this in mind, the Soviets used their theater forces and declaratory statements to deter NATO use of armed force against them.

The Soviets, themselves, have never demonstrated any intention to start nuclear warfare in Europe. Preemption is a different matter because it would be triggered by the West. The noticeable Soviet uncertainty over the initiation of nuclear warfare is a result of ceding the nuclear option to NATO.

The so-called Soviet "rejection" of conventional warfare is actually fear of NATO escalation. The Soviets reject conventional warfare only in the sense that they wish to avoid war in general and nuclear war in particular. In the event of war, however, the Soviet military leaders would be more than willing to put the issue to a conventional test. To use a Soviet strategist's apt phraseology, we in the West should not "distort the sense of the USSR's position on the question of limited wars."<sup>58</sup>

As the strategic nuclear balance shifted in the 1960s, the Soviets began to reason that NATO might be prevented from using nuclear weapons after all. Increased US emphasis on the conventional aspect of "flexible response" along with disarray in NATO over use of tactical nuclear weapons contributed to this judgment. As a result, in the mid-1960s, the Soviets modified their policies to prepare for the possibility of conventional warfare in Europe. In recent years, Soviet confidence in the validity of this doctrinal shift undoubtedly increased with the attainment of strategic nuclear parity with the United States.



My thesis that the Soviets now see a decreased chance of nuclear warfare in Europe is substantiated by the trend in their statements, writings, exercises, and force posture.

The Soviets remain uncertain over the duration of conventional operations because they can never be sure that NATO won't use nuclear weapons at some point to avoid defeat--"the threat of a nuclear blow would constantly hang over the belligerents."<sup>59</sup> Therefore, the Soviets will probably continue to emphasize balance between nuclear and conventional means in their theater forces. It's almost certain, however, that the Soviets would fight with conventional weapons as long as NATO would or at least until the NATO Central Army Group reached the river Niemen--until the survival of the Soviet state is threatened.

It is obviously of great importance for the United States and the rest of NATO to understand the evolution in Soviet thinking concerning war in Europe. The ramifications are far-reaching. In view of the Soviet position and the current strategic balance, it is time for NATO to rethink its doctrine concerning the use of nuclear weapons in Europe. Perhaps NATO's nuclear policies are, in fact, "bankrupt."



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13. ABSTRACT			
<p>An analysis of the operational Soviet view on the possibility of conventional warfare between NATO and the Warsaw Pact in Europe. Soviet perceptions and policies concerning this subject since World War II are found to be mainly reactions to the prevailing nuclear balance. The Soviets would have preferred conventional warfare at any time during the period. Until the attainment of a credible strategic nuclear deterrent in the mid-1960s, they assumed that the United States would use nuclear weapons against them in a European conflict. Since that time the Soviets have reasoned that the United States and the rest of NATO may be deterred from the use of nuclear weapons. Accordingly, they have placed increased emphasis on preparations for conventional warfare in Europe. Soviet policy statements, military writings, training exercises, and force posture are found to accord with this general view. The Soviets, of course, can never be certain that NATO will not resort to nuclear weapons to avoid defeat. Given a choice, however, the Soviets will fight with conventional means alone as long as the survival of the Soviet state is not threatened.</p>			